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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

20 December 1948

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM NO. 105

SUBJECT: Soviet Capabilities to Wage Biological Warfare

1. There is no reliable evidence that the Soviet Union is or is not capable of waging large-scale biological warfare at this time. We believe, however, that the USSR is capable of carrying out small-scale covert operations against man, domestic animals, or crop plants. In any event, the Soviet Union possesses, and will possess during 1949, potentialities for waging biological warfare equivalent to those of the United States.

2. This opinion is based upon the following considerations:

a. Research Personnel and Establishments.

The Soviet Union has competent and experienced micro-biologists who are acquainted with German developments in biological warfare up to late 1945 and with subsequent US work in this field described in the open literature. Recent unevaluated reports indicate the existence of at least two stations for research and development of biological warfare agents. There are a number of institutes engaged in bacteriological research and consequently suitable for small-scale production of biological warfare agents. According to German and Japanese intelligence, the Soviet Union began research and development on biological warfare prior to World War II. One of their research stations (believed to be on an island in the Aral Sea) was not disturbed during the war.

b. Test Areas.

There are unconfirmed reports of the existence of a test area on the Kanin Peninsula and on Kolguev Island. The latter is said to have been established for test firing of missiles equipped with warheads containing agents for biological warfare.

c. Types and Production of Agents.

Although it is known that pathogenic microorganisms suitable for biological warfare have been studied in the Soviet Union, it is not known which organisms have been selected for production for biological warfare, nor is it known what quantities of these agents have been or can be produced. The storage locations of agents already produced, if any, is unknown.

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Since some agents can be produced by adaptation of well-known fermentation procedures, the Soviet Union undoubtedly possesses adequate capability in this field. Very recent reports indicate that the USSR is experiencing considerable difficulty with large-scale industrial production of penicillin. This surprising inability suggests that they may experience corresponding, but less serious, difficulties in the production of certain types of biological warfare agents.

d. Methods of Dissemination.

There is no information on this subject, except for the unconfirmed report, mentioned above, on trials of biological warfare agents in warheads of missiles launched from Kolguev Island. The small bulk of an effective quantity of such agents obviously lends itself to delivery by a great variety of conventional and unconventional methods.

e. Training of Personnel in Offensive Use.

No information, but in view of the existence of scientific personnel competent to advise on biological warfare, the USSR ought to be able to train personnel.

f. Organization and Supporting Military Functions, Logistics, and Staff Planning.

No information.

g. Defensive Potential.

The capability of the Soviet Union, or of any other country, to protect its human population and its animals and crops against biological warfare depends on its capacity to handle natural outbreaks of disease and on its preparedness to meet the special problems of biological warfare. We know nothing of any special efforts the Soviet Union may have made to defend itself against BW, but general information on the medical and agriculture services of the USSR indicates that its defensive capacity is less than that of the United States. We have already mentioned the Soviet shortage of domestic penicillin. We have no information on the supply of other antibiotics and of vaccines, on mass immunization, on physical protective measures, or on civilian defense planning.

3. The reader who needs background information on biological warfare is referred to the following Top Secret document:

Appreciation of Biological Warfare, Research and Development Department, Chemical Warfare Service, Camp Detrick, Frederick, Maryland, 31 July 1946. It bears the number SD-8915.

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